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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001195

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SUBJECT: A/S BOUCHER'S MEETINGS IN BISHKEK

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher met with a range of Kyrgyz Government officials, parliamentary deputies, business and civil society leaders, and American implementing partners during his August 10-11 visit to Bishkek. A/S Boucher used the meetings to gauge the current state of U.S.-Kyrgyz relations, to push for steps to strengthen bilateral cooperation, and to show support for U.S. Government programs and outreach efforts in Kyrgyzstan. A/S Boucher specifically urged senior Kyrgyz Government officials to refrain from allowing third parties to interfere in our relations (as they had in the recent PNG crisis), to demonstrate support for the Manas Air Base agreement, to regularize the Embassy's surveillance detection program, and he encouraged greater attention to regional integration. Foreign Minister Jekshenkulov told Boucher that both sides should move beyond recent difficulties and focus on economic and security cooperation. Prime Minister Kulov briefed on the constitutional reform process and invited greater American investment, specifically in the power sector. A/S Boucher's meeting with President Bakiyev will be reported septel. End Summary.

12. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher was accompanied in all meetings by Ambassador Yovanovitch and Senior Advisor Hayden.

PM KULOV: REFORMS MOVING AHEAD

13. (C) During a friendly and open discussion August 10, Prime Minister Felix Kulov briefed on the constitutional reform process, saying it was necessary to move slowly to improve the current drafts and to ensure that there were sufficient checks and balances between government institutions in any final version of a new constitution. Kulov said that his main concern was economic development and that more radical reforms were needed. Privatization would allow Kyrgyzstan to

export electricity successfully, and he attached much significance to ongoing discussions with the American firm AES, with an eye toward export of electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kulov expressed his satisfaction with the final Manas Base agreement, which would also help the Kyrgyz address terrorism issues. He said that the provision of helicopters under the agreement would enable the Kyrgyz to undertake operations in the mountainous south, especially in detecting drug traffickers in a timely manner.

14. (C) A/S Boucher welcomed the Prime Minister's statements regarding the power sector, in particular regarding discussions with AES. Boucher said that the U.S. was very pleased with the Manas Air Base agreement, and he suggested that a show of support for the Base from the Prime Minister and other senior Kyrgyz Government officials -- possibly a visit to the Base on September 11 -- would be appreciated. Boucher also thanked the Prime Minister for his help in establishing a commission to resolve the problem of the American University in Central Asia (AUCA) law program, and stated that the university was important as an institution that the U.S. continues to support, and as a symbol of the relations between Kyrgyzstan and the U.S.

FM JEKSHENKULOV: PUTTING RECENT DIFFICULTIES BEHIND US

15. (C) In an August 10 meeting, Foreign Minister Alikbek Jekshenkulov moved quickly to try to "turn the page" on recent strains in the bilateral relationship and to focus on future cooperation. Jekshenkulov attributed recent problems to "forces that want to come between us," and claimed that he wanted to pursue a balanced foreign policy. Jekshenkulov encouraged strategic investments from the U.S., particularly

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in energy, agriculture, communication, and mining. He also made a pointed plea for continued U.S. Government support of Kyrgyzstan's Drug Control Agency (DCA).

16. (C) A/S Boucher noted that recent negative Kyrgyz Government actions had come as a surprise to us and had raised doubts in Washington about the Kyrgyz Government's intentions. The U.S. had responded with steps it thought necessary, and no further action was planned. Boucher urged working together on issues in common, such as the Manas Air Base agreement, and he urged Jekshenkulov and other senior officials to demonstrate their support for the agreement. Boucher also raised regional integration efforts, encouraging the Kyrgyz to work with AES on its feasibility study of power lines to Afghanistan. Finally, Boucher said that the U.S. was committed to moving forward with the Millennium Challenge Account program, but questions have been raised about the direction in which Kyrgyzstan is moving.

PARLIAMENT: A MIXED REVIEW

17. (C) Parliamentary Speaker Marat Sultanov told A/S Boucher that he would give parliament a "50-50 grade" for how well it has fulfilled its oversight responsibilities vis-a-vis the president and the government. Regarding constitutional reform, Sultanov said that Central Asian "tendencies towards authoritarianism" meant that a strong presidential form of government was dangerous; similarly, the parliamentary form had disadvantages, as Kyrgyzstan's democracy was likely too fragile to survive the infighting of shifting party alliances that would accompany such a system. Sultanov concluded that he favors a middle-ground mixed form of government, adding that he believed President Bakiyev and many members of parliament were also beginning to lean more towards the mixed form as well. A/S Boucher suggested that Sultanov consider a trip to the United States.

18. (C) In an August 11 meeting, parliamentary deputy and chair of the constitutional working group Azimbek Beknazarov spoke mainly about the role of the judiciary and the issue of corruption. Beknazarov said that he was troubled by the absence of rule of law in Kyrgyzstan. Referring to the return of five Uzbek refugees to Uzbekistan, he said that the Kyrgyz Government would do anything to please Karimov, and that the refugee return was likely a "present" to the Uzbek president in the lead up to Bakiyev's visit to Tashkent later this year.

ISLAMIC CLERICS: STRUGGLING FOR YOUNG MINDS

19. (C) During a meeting at the Central Mosque in Bishkek, Mufti Muratala aji Jumanov, the rector of the Islamic University, and several Islamic clerics expressed their gratitude for the warm relationship with the Embassy and the Muslim Outreach programs, which have sent dozens of Islamic leaders to the U.S. While pleased with these close ties, the Mufti candidly shared his concerns about the misleading portrayal of the Islamic faith by the U.S. Government and Western media, specifically addressing the way terrorist acts are often stereotypically labeled "Islamic terrorism." When asked about Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT), the Mufti said he believed that the fundamentalist organization does not have popular support among Kyrgyz citizens. He said he opposed the group's desire to create an unconstitutional state, asserting that Kyrgyzstan must operate within the confines of its constitution. When asked about the recent killing of Imam Muhammadrafiq Kamalov during a police operation in Osh, the Mufti and rector felt that an investigation by the authorities was needed, and they doubted claims that Kamalov was linked to terrorists.

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NON-GOVERNMENT ACTORS: SIMILAR THEMES

110. (C) During a roundtable discussion with representatives from American civil society implementing partners (Freedom House, Urban Institute, IFES, International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute), the participants were skeptical that the constitutional reform process would bring substantive change, though some expressed hope that a form of proportional representation in parliament would emerge, which would make the development of true political parties more viable. Bakiyev was consolidating his power over the government, but that government was increasingly weak, making it suspicious of outside civil society actors.

111. (C) Five Kyrgyz civil society leaders noted that civil society has a real voice in Kyrgyzstan and engages with the government in policy debate and discussion. As Kyrgyz political parties were not well developed, non-governmental organizations actually played more of an oppositionist role than did the parties themselves. Kyrgyz business leaders suggested that the U.S. continue to help with constitutional reform and rule of law and also increase direct investment, particularly in the energy sector. They called the conditions in Kyrgyzstan still "unsettled."

112. (C) Each group agreed that corruption was the single largest problem facing the country. When asked how best to address the issue, most thought that a widespread crackdown was not possible, in part because the central government was too weak, salaries were too low, and close family and clan ties made for multiple conflicts of interests. They argued that a step-by-step approach, addressing regulatory improvements and reducing rent-seeking opportunities was more likely to have an impact.

POLICE ACADEMY: NEW CENTER OPENED

¶13. (U) On August 11, A/S Boucher inaugurated the new U.S. Government-financed forensic training center at the Kyrgyz Academy for Traffic. In his remarks at the opening ceremony, Boucher emphasized the role of the center -- and of a well-trained police force -- in promoting the rule of law and combating corruption Kyrgyzstan. Interior Minister Murat Sutalinov thanked the Assistant Secretary for the many contributions that the U.S. has made recently to strengthen Kyrgyz law enforcement efforts.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) The Assistant Secretary's visit focused attention on several key issues, including strengthening the bilateral relationship, supporting the base agreement, making constitutional reform transparent, and building on regional integration efforts. Kyrgyz Government interlocutors clearly wanted to move past the recent strains in the bilateral relationship and to talk about areas of future cooperation, especially economic assistance and investment. In that regard, Prime Minister Kulov hit positive notes with his discussion of Kyrgyz cooperation with AES and the efforts to resolve the American University of Central Asia's problems. As other interlocutors pointed out, however, much will depend on how the government manages the constitutional reform process and how it addresses the problem of corruption. END COMMENT.

¶15. (U) A/S Boucher has cleared this message.
YOVANOVITCH